## Roy Meachum

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# 30 years

The next day I probably couldn't have recalled, 30 years later it is totally impossible to say why Jack Jurey and I wound up in the nearly empty Broadcast House cafeteria, eating together that November afternoon.

Readers with long memories will remember Jack was on-air editorialist for WTOP-TV, now called WUSA. He was also managing editor for the news operations, including the radio station, which was transmitted throughout the building on speakers.

The first CBS special report out of Dallas, delivered in modulated tones, had special dimensions of surrealism among the tile, formica and linoleum, which provided backdrop to the recently installed vending machines, the first I had ever seen that served hot soups and stews, sandwiches and desserts.

The Hot Shoppes contract had not been renewed, removing the workers whose human presence might have mitigated the overwhelming sense of unreality created by the grim announcement. Maybe.

As with all life's great occasions, personal or universal, the story of someone shooting President John F. Kennedy stunned everyone. At least Jack and I were not left with the completely helpless feeling that afflicted most folks. Before Walter Cronkite's strangely unfamiliar voice, as much as the gruesome truths he stammered out, could register despair, the editor and I were running for the elevator, headed for our respective offices.

The next several days were spent at my typewriter and in production facilities. I returned home to shower in the middle of the night; the children slept through the visit. I was preparing a radio special for Sunday evening, which meant events in the outside world those first hours escaped me.

By the time the new work week dawned, Mr. Kennedy's secular sainthood had been established. Not until midnight, early Monday morning really, could I pay attention to what became, because of television's impact, the most profound public trauma in human experience.

The banging of the requiem kettles and dunning dirges could not be escaped entirely, thanks to those wired-in speakers. But the immeasurable proportions of my fellow Americans' grief were intrusions that had to be shut out, in order to get my project done. It probably didn't matter.

For whatever cause, I have never been caught up in the Kennedy myth. Long before his death, stories of his sleeping about, while parading his "perfect" marriage, had diminished the man in my mind, particularly since I had come to know his wife.

Don't misunderstand: There is no claim here to have been Jackie Kennedy's friend. We had seen each other half-a-dozen times and talked maybe twice. I was not smitten, but believed her someone who worked hard at being a mother and a wife. At any rate, hypocrisy rates in the depths of human failings, for my money.

Mr. Kennedy smelled like an offensively cocksure politician, even before details and specific names of his various affairs, like dirty jokes, filtered through to me. Even as a young man, I had no patience with smutty humor. Nevertheless, the president's reputation simply could not be avoided.

However, to be fair, I had never fallen for the Massachusetts man's charm. In 1960 my vote had gone for Richard Nixon, but only because President Eisenhower was not running again. That election may have been the first that brought the realization ballots rarely advance the fabled Best Man. We are generally given the choice of lesser evils. (To keep the record straight, I never voted for Nixon again.)

The only way the Irish mafia would have received my support would have come from my perception bigots might turn out its chief for his Catholic faith. Once Mr. Kennedy bounded over that hurdle he no longer needed me.

In those several years when the White House was transformed into their Camelot, I came to admire the Kennedys' style, granting his grace and her cultural understanding. But I was exposed enough, in that much smaller Washington, to the presidential presence that an immunity was generated to his undoubted charm.

Of course, long-time readers know I performed odd jobs for the Johnson White House. It is possible to speculate I was caught up in the lingering hard feelings between the Massachusetts and Texas crews. Certainly Bobby Kennedy's snotty manners toward his brother's successor struck me as unnecessarily cruel, considering the protective patina enjoyed by the holdover attorney general.

But as my 1960 vote demonstrated, I was never a candidate for the Kennedy bandwagon, before or after his death. The assassination filled me with disgust at the violence, sorrow for the family and dread for my country's future.

The brutal murder of a president touched me to the core, but life demanded carrying on, especially with the opportunity presented to ram civil rights reform through a cowardly Congress and a reluctant public. The Kennedys talked the game, without really knowing how to score.

Before his administration became overwhelmed with Vietnam, it should be remembered Lyndon B. Johnson brought the nation's social laws into the 20th century. I never really liked the man, but couldn't help admiring his strengths.

In any event, since this 30th anniversary of his death has brought forth a torrent of observations, generally aimed at John Fitzgerald Kennedy's further sanctification, I felt obliged to throw in a balancing word.